TYPE SPACING
BY E. R. CURRIER

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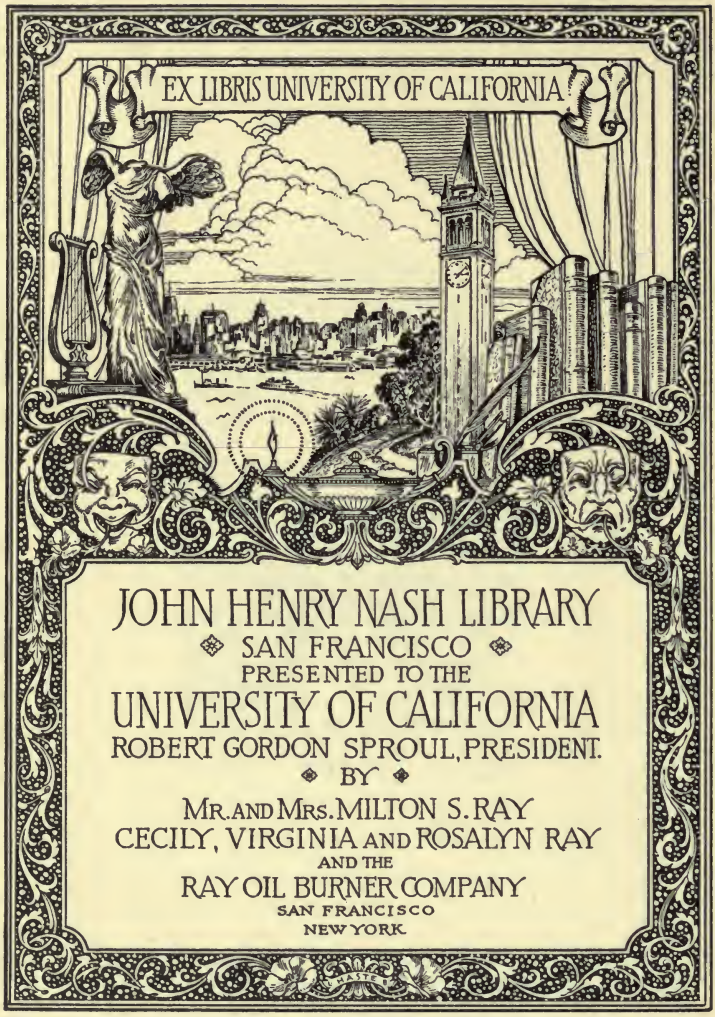

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BY E. R. CURRIER

J. M. BOWLES · NEW YORK

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BY E.R.CUDRIER

J.M.BOWLES, NEW YORK

TO make the printed page as effective as possible, by the simplest possible means, is perhaps the clearest statement that we can make of the whole function of typographic art. For its accomplishment there must be a technique of typography, clearly distinguished from the merely mechanical operations of typesetting. All the particulars of this technique may be summed up in the one all-inclusive word Spacing, since, broadly speaking, type cannot be set without being spaced. But the spacing of type, in so far as it relates to effectiveness in typographic arrangement, means more than simply putting type into a stick. It means space adjustment, whether in the layout, on the galley, or in the proof. It means the orderly contrasting of white with black space for the sake of legibility, decorative quality, and "attention value." It means making distinctions, as for example between the use of the four- and the five-em space, the one- and the two-point lead, between letter-spacing and no letter-spacing, between setting flush and indenting. In short it means knowledge and application of all the little touches which the eye of the trained typographer notes as essential to perfect, or at least excellent, work.

Now how many ways are there of adjusting space

in typography? Analysis shows three, which must be considered not so much as "ways" merely, but as fundamental elements, in fact as the three universals of typographic arrangement. They are Spacing (in its specific sense), or the adjustment of *words*; Leading, or the adjustment of *lines*; and Indention. Logically, the spacing of letters should be included in this classification, but it is omitted here for the reason that it cannot be regarded as a universal element. At the same time letter-spacing is of far-reaching importance, and much special consideration might be given it under a separate head.

The space between words in ordinary Roman lower case which secures greatest comfort to the eye, and therefore the normal space, is generally accepted to be the three-em. This amount is usually sufficient also for the lower case of Gothics (Sans-serif), Boldfaces, and other display types. Condensed faces will of course require proportionately less and capitals proportionately more space.

But exception should be made to the use of the three-em as a universal standard. Indeed exception *is* made by careful typographers. A page composed in the pleasing Caslon italic, for example, appears to better advantage when spaced with the four-em, especially in poetry, where the unevenness is taken up at the end of the line. A slightly compressed letter like the Century Roman, or a close-fitted font such as the much used Cheltenham, will also be found to read more comfort-

ably if the four-em space is used as the standard.

The idea that because matter is wide-leaded it should also be widely spaced between words, is a fallacy. Mechanical necessity does indeed demand wide spacing in occasional lines, as in overrunning around cuts in extremely narrow measures, but this has nothing to do with the deliberate choice as a standard of as many as two three-em spaces, as is frequently done. It is the exception when unduly wide spacing does not both hinder the eye and mar the page. Certain it is that the opportunities for those familiar blemishes known as "rivers" are most prevalent in the widely spaced page, and most easily avoided by close spacing. The effect which a page should produce is that of a uniform succession of gray horizontal lines of greater or less color, according to the face used. But such an effect cannot be easily secured when, as Mr. Bernard Shaw says, "rivers of white trickle down between the words like rain-drops on the window-pane."

The development of machine composition, with all the mechanical advantages it has brought, has not made for improved spacing. The automatic spacing devices seem to have put normally compact spacing quite out of the question. Almost any example of machine composition will reveal an unpleasant openness between words. In many instances when the writer has objected to abnormally wide spacing in proofs submitted to him,

he has been met with the explanation that it was "machine composition."

But regardless of the process of typesetting, it is impossible to avoid an occasional open line, and sometimes two or three in succession, in a page otherwise normally spaced. Type is very inflexible; and alterations of copy are not always possible. When the word *through*, for example, refuses to "come in" at the end of a line, there is nothing to do but space the line out. But the gaps in such a line should be concealed as much as possible by normally spacing the lines immediately preceding and following, rather than by gradually reducing the gaps in successive lines until the normal is again reached. Even color as a whole will be better preserved by the former method.

Whether divisions such as a-mong or no-thing, for example, or the turning over of the terminations -ing, -ed, should be allowed, or whether the line should be badly spaced to avoid them, offers a choice of two evils. Office style in general seems to prefer bad spacing to word divisions of this sort, though it is hard to understand why. The degree to which the reader can be misled or hampered by such divisions is insignificant, and is not to be compared with the hampering of the eye and marring of the page with the wide gaps occasioned by keeping the words whole. The placing of hyphens at the end of lines is in most printing-houses governed by "office style." The rule is established,

let us say, that divisions shall not occur in more than three lines in succession. Some printers go as far as to reduce the number allowed to one. No recognition is given to the fact that what will be applicable to one type or measure will be far from appropriate for another. A page may be set in nonpareil in, say, twenty-four picas measure, without the necessity for a single division. But on the other hand a page of twelve-point or larger, in a column ten picas wide, may demand as many as four or even six successive divisions to make it space comfortably. It would seem therefore that no rule should be laid down as to the number of hyphens in succession which may be allowed; but rather that the matter should be allowed to take care of itself. It is true that a row of hyphens at the end of successive lines is not entirely pleasing, though after all it is but mildly defective as compared with a page or column badly spaced to avoid divisions, and may therefore be regarded as the less of the two evils. Further proof is offered in the finest, most dignified and most permanent examples of typography that have been produced. It should be the attitude of typographers that even spacing is a thing to be *preserved* and not to be violated, and that the hyphen is a most convenient help to this end.

Certain other points, in themselves trivial, but nevertheless essential to good typography, should be mentioned. These are the treatment of space

between sentences; between words whose spacing is modified by the sloping inward or outward of its end-letters; and between the word and the punctuation mark.

The best typographers have already discovered that there is no good reason for following the practice of inserting a full em-quad between sentences. As punctuation the em-quad is really superfluous, since the presence of the period and capital provide sufficient emphasis over the spacing between other words in the line to mark the new sentence. Further the em-quad is productive of white "holes," which do not contribute to the attractiveness of the page. Cases are especially numerous in magazine advertisements where deference to this traditional use of the em-quad has upset the spacing of whole paragraphs.

That discrimination should be used in the amount of space between words whose end-letters overhang (——f j——), and those whose end-letters slope away (——y w——), or where the comma is used, seems too obvious to need mentioning. And that careful typography demands the placing of a thin space before the colon and semicolon, and the interrogation and exclamation marks, seems also unnecessary to explain, since every apprentice in type composition is supposed to be taught these things. But one often sees evidence of their neglect even in the typography of books which aim at perfection.

Whether or not the points we have just considered be observed in the composition of reading matter, their importance must be recognized in display composition. Especially is this true in the case of magazine advertisements, in which the cost of bringing type to the nicest possible adjustment is as nothing compared to the value of the space occupied.

The fundamental principle to be followed in spacing type is, that since the spacing of words concerns the direction in which the eye moves when reading, only as much space as is sufficient to distinguish one word from another shall be used.

The liberties which the early English printers, notably Caxton, took with abbreviations, elisions, and alterations in spelling, gave them a ready means of securing uniformity of spacing such as is no longer available. But whoever wishes to be convinced that for the modern printer the capacity for taking pains is a very good substitute for these devices, may study with profit the productions of such men as Updike, Rogers and Gilliss.

Leading, or line-spacing, as it may be called, is the adjustment of space between lines of type by means of thin strips of lead, brass, card or paper. The use of leading should not be regarded, as it so often is to the detriment of appearance, as a convenient device for correcting bad guesses as to the proper sizes of type for a given space, but rather as a most useful means of regulating the legibility

and color value of the composed masses of type.

In display composition, especially in those most difficult of all forms, the title-page and the letter-head, the only principle which it seems can be laid down as belonging to the subject of leading is that uniformity rather than diversity in the spacing of closely related lines is desirable. This is not a uniformity as to points but as the eye sees it.

With reference to reading matter as distinguished from display, it goes without saying that uniformity of leading is essential in a page or block of matter that is continuous and of one size and face; but whether a page should be solid, or single- or wide-leaded, can only be determined by the character of face, the length of line, the relation of type mass to margins, and whether reading ease or color value is the primary aim.

To illustrate the value of uniformity in leading, let us take for example the case of a catalogue or booklet in which the reading matter begins a new subject and varies in length on each page. The ideal way to make pages of this character fill out to a uniform length is of course to add to or cut from the copy or the proof. Where this cannot be done, however, there should be no attempt to pad out the short pages with extra leads. The effect of non-uniform leading is offensive, particularly on facing pages. A left-hand page, for instance, set in solid ten-point, with its companion or facing page in the same type opened out with

two-point leads, produces a violation of symmetry which is rarely necessary. The simplest, most obvious and best treatment for pages of this sort is, first, to have one common point of "sinkage" from the top; second, by all means to preserve the uniformity of leading; and third, to permit all pages to end as they will by putting the extra space at the bottom.

Assuming that the maximum of reading ease is sought, it may be said in general that long lines and heavy lines require more space between them than short and light ones. In all cases, the general effect of a page should show more space between lines than between words, though in spite of the obviousness of this fact, it is very common to find pages which appear to have been composed as though intended to "read down" and "read up," like a time-table.

A line of type containing more than twelve words may be considered a long line, whether it be in agate or in six-line pica. The best reading length for a line of type is from seven to ten words, and to extend the line beyond this normal length sets a task upon the eye. In lines of excessive length, such as are occasionally found in magazine pages, documents and advertisements, the eye has difficulty in finding its way back to the beginning of the next line, a difficulty which can be lessened by wider leading.

Speaking generally, there is scarcely any type

face, heavy or light, which in point of readability is at its best when set solid. Usually the addition of a two-point lead is considered necessary to bring the type to a comfortable adjustment. Were it not that the consideration of space economy frequently makes it necessary to reduce the amount of white between lines to an absolute minimum, types would be cast with more "shoulder" and then to set type solid would be to set it normally.

But one or two exceptions to the generalization that all type faces appear to best advantage when leaded, may well be made. Take for example a book page, or a straight-matter advertisement occupying the whole of a magazine page. Either of these, set solid in Old Style Antique of perhaps ten-point (or, as it would have been ten years ago, in Jenson), will have a most satisfying vigor of color, and will be found, if carefully spaced in other respects, to be normally readable. However, it does not follow, because a particular face like Old Style Antique composes well solid, that any heavy type will do likewise. In fact, the majority of heavy faces are not at all to be included in the above exception.

Another exception, which so far from being merely allowable is emphatically desirable, is in the use of Blackletter or "Old English." Take for example the popular representative known as Priory Text; one would not think of using this, a purely decorative type in Anglo-Saxon eyes, for

advertisements, except in an occasional line. But in its appropriate place, the book page, or in any of the primarily decorative forms of printing, Blackletter gives a very rich effect. There is, in fact, but one way to handle this type, which is to allow an absolute minimum of white space, between both words and lines. As its name implies, Blackletter, exactly the opposite of Roman, is the style in which the black of the face exceeds the white between the parts of the letter. Therefore, being a decorative letter, its character should be emphasized by compact spacing. As a demonstration of this fact, one has only to examine a page of the Gutenberg Bible (or a reproduction from it), printed from the first type ever cut. This is acknowledged to be the finest example of Blackletter typography ever produced, one which four centuries of typographic development and effort have failed to equal. The use of Blackletter however is limited, and becomes a minor problem compared with the many which are presented in the use of Roman types.

Printers are familiar with the fact that it was only during the closing years of the last century that the use of heavy types as a body letter came again into something like the vogue which they had enjoyed at the hands of the early printers, as a reaction from what William Morris considered the deplorable state of typography, both as to the types in use and their treatment. But Morris went

much farther than the mere attempt to get the effect he sought with such types as were at hand. He designed new types, based on manuscript models, and the splendid effects of rich color he obtained were due quite as much to this as to their compactness in spacing.

Still another exception, and this on the score of space economy rather than appearance, must be made to the objection to close leading. There are of course practical reasons for setting type compactly, for literally squeezing it into the smallest possible space. In the case of the thousand-page catalogue, and the small magazine advertisement at ninety-eight dollars an inch, much consideration for white between lines is not to be expected. However, in such cases legibility is still preserved to a degree by the use of the clearest and simplest type face possible.

At the other extreme from this solid massing of type is the wide-leaded treatment, also a consistent and excellent style. Provided due care is taken in adjustment of margins and in word-spacing, extreme wide leading may be used with good effect. There is a certain grace and sumptuousness to a wide-leaded page when skilfully handled. This was the characteristic style of the Eighteenth Century French typographers, the charm of whose books has never been surpassed. But wide leading may easily produce a slovenly result, as, in a five-by-seven page of ten-point

opened with four leads, with no more than a half-inch margin all around.

Wide leading presupposes ample margins, but, as has already been pointed out, does not call for wide word-spacing. On the contrary, a page both wide-leaded and wide-spaced between words is bad. Such a page appears to be disintegrating, and suggests that the paper, instead of the type, is intended to be read.

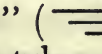
It should be borne in mind that in the direction which the eye has to follow, only as much space should be used as is sufficient to distinguish one word from another. For this reason, whatever goes beyond this is an interruption to the eye. There should be no alteration in the standard of word-spacing, whether the matter is to be solid or open. A wide-leaded page may well be close-spaced between words, but the reverse of this, namely, the absence of leads in matter widely spaced, is unquestionably bad.

It may be remarked in passing that there is little scope for either of these "styles," as such, in the advertisement or circular. Both these styles are essentially of the book. But it may also be observed that the best fault (?) a type or style of handling can have is that it is bookish. The book page presents the fundamental problems in typography, and what will pass muster in it is at least safe in any other connection, the reverse being decidedly not true.

With reference to book composition, the use of leads has still another aspect. In houses making a specialty of this work, leads of varying thickness are used such as are practically unknown in other work, as, for example, three-to-pica and ten-to-pica. For the general run of work the difference in effect obtained by the use of these leads is hardly worth considering. Adjustments finer than those which can be made with one- and two-point leads are scarcely ever required in more than a few lines, and these can more economically be made with card. But with book work the case is different. Here the slightest variation in thickness of a lead affects not only the margin of the page, but the number of pages.

Concerning the matter of leading, there remains to be said simply this, that neither very close nor very wide leading is necessarily bad, and that uniformity, no matter how many leads are used, is the cardinal principle to be observed.

Indention is the setting in from the margin of one or more lines of type, or the narrowing, on one or both sides, of a portion of a column. It is not a device for enhancing the appearance of a page, but on the contrary tends to detract from its simplicity of outline and its compactness. Indention has a distinct function to perform, which is to *punctuate*, and since type pages are meant to be read more than to be looked at, a certain amount of this punctuation is necessary.

The principal and characteristic use of indention is to mark the beginnings of paragraphs in reading matter. But it also serves to distinguish certain styles of arrangement of headings and display lines, as in "hanging" ( ) and "inverted pyramid" () indention. Headings set in the latter style are rather inelegantly known in newspaper offices as "bags."

In addition to these two particular uses, indention has a more general and less clearly defined function in the arrangement of all forms of display and "broken" matter.

Indention is the universal method of indicating paragraphs in the regular forms of plain reading matter. For ordinary widths, as of a book page or magazine column, the one-em indention is standard. Wider indention is never really necessary, though it is common practice to increase the indention in matter of very wide measure.

In minor forms where but few paragraphs occur, indention may for the sake of effect be omitted, but its omission in larger forms, such as book work, can rarely be regarded as other than a mannerism. The safe procedure is to adopt for office style the long-established custom of one-em paragraph indention, and to depart from this only when out of the range of the larger and more dignified forms, where a touch of novelty is desirable and where it can be introduced without obscuring the paragraph and without undue fussing.

There are certain other features which, in order to preserve a clean-cut page contour, may be allowed to stand as substitutes for paragraph indention where paragraphs are few. In matter of this sort the chance sometimes may be taken that the last line of the preceding paragraph will go short, in which case the paragraph is sufficiently punctuated without indention. Paragraphs may also be indicated by inserting extra leads between them as a substitute for indention, though this practice is to be avoided in book work.

Another device for avoiding indention and also for securing even more emphasis than is afforded by indention is the insertion of the paragraph sign (¶). This may be employed effectively where novelty is desirable, but its use in modern printing of a serious and dignified nature is not to be recommended.

This principle of the use of indention applies to every form of printed matter with equal force. Since, as was said, the use of indention does not enhance the appearance of a page, it should be used only when it renders some service as punctuation. The benefit of any doubt may safely be given to simplicity of outline.

Referring to this matter of space adjustment as a whole, and particularly to those "little touches" which have been mentioned as indispensable to perfect work, one general hint of practical value may be given. If the proof submitted to you is

"choppy" and confused in appearance and requires readjustment, look first to see what can be done to improve it by the simpler expedients. It may be that the changing of a few leads, or the weeding out of unnecessary indentions, will work a decided improvement and make the page quiet and simple. Remember that a lead can be transposed or a quad shifted much more easily and economically than lines can be reset.

In conclusion, it may be well to bear in mind that, while work will have some merit if carefully spaced, no matter how ugly or inappropriate the type, the choicest type face in the world may have its beauty or its legibility nullified by bad spacing.

The tools are not superior to the workman.

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